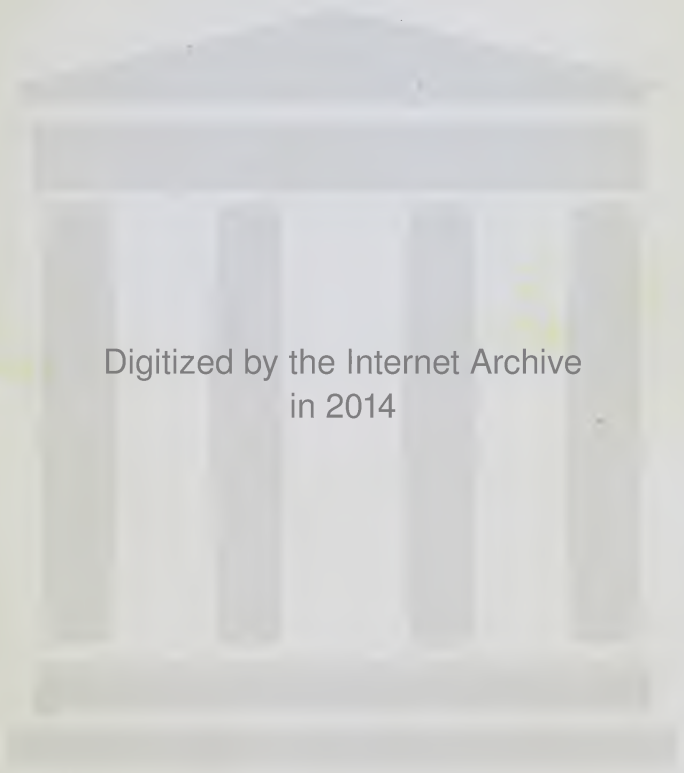


THE VOICE OF WALES

Mr. Wyn Griffith, editor of the oldest Welsh Society, The Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion, and a member of the committee of the International P.E.N. Club, is well known both in England and Wales and in the U.S.A. as a poet, essayist, and writer on Wales and Welsh culture. His latest novel, *The Way Lies West*, is a story of life in Wales some 100 years ago.

In the present essay he describes those arts in which the people of Wales have always excelled—their music and poetry. In Wales, the ancient tradition of singing poems to the accompaniment of the harp has been handed down from the most ancient times. For many centuries the Welsh Eisteddfod, a festival devoted to music and literature, and truly national in character, has fostered this traditional interest in the two arts. To understand the importance of the Welsh language and literary tradition that have preserved their independence in a large area of the British Isles is to understand in part the rich national heritage of the Welsh people.



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Cader Idris

(From the painting by Richard Wilson (1790). By kind permission of the National Gallery, London)

THE VOICE OF WALES

MUSIC AND LITERATURE

by
WYN GRIFFITH

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The map on the front cover is reproduced by kind permission of the National Museum of Wales. The original is Humphrey Lhuyd's Map of Wales (1570), the first to be printed of Wales alone.

ERRATA

facing page 13. The names under the photographs should be transposed: T. Gwynn Jones on the left and Professor W. J. Gruffydd on the right. We offer every apology for a vexatious error.

facing page 28. For *Tremadoch* read *Tremadoc*.

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THE VOICE OF WALES

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

ON the western seaboard of England, between the ports of Liverpool and Bristol, lies a small country called Wales. In shape, it is roughly rectangular, with two arms of land stretching out into the sea towards Ireland. The maps show a boundary between Wales and England, but there is no frontier; the first indications to a traveller that he has crossed from England into Wales are the sound of a different language, a change in the looks of the people, and a different tune in the voice even when he hears English spoken. He finds himself in a country half the size of Switzerland, with about two million inhabitants; half of them speak Welsh and English, and half speak English only. In the remoter parts of the country the traveller will find people who cannot speak English, and many of those who can speak both languages cannot fully express themselves in English; they think in Welsh, and Welsh is the language of the home and of all their activities among themselves.

How has it come to pass that in a comparatively small island like Great Britain, with its forty-six and a half million inhabitants, there still survives a small country of two million people which has its own language, a language totally different from English, and unrelated to it? It is not because England decided to make an archaeological preserve of Wales, to cherish a quaint survival for the delectation of travellers, to encourage the growth of such a phenomenon as a natural

curiosity. Wales owes its identity to the fact that the Welsh and English are different peoples, of different origins, and the stubborn persistence of its individuality as a country shows clearly that Wales is not a mere term in geography.

Who, then, are the Welsh, and how did they come to live in Wales?

From time immemorial, Britain has absorbed wave after wave of invaders from Europe. The westward movement of peoples through Central Europe and towards the Atlantic, in Paleolithic and Neolithic times, brought a succession of adventurers to this island, and each wave of invaders pushed its predecessors towards the mountainous country of Wales. In the five centuries before the Christian era, the pace of invasion quickened, and a flood of warlike Celtic-speaking people came from the Continent, driving the Iberians they found in Britain into the comparative safety of Wales. The Celts established there a dominant civilization, tribal in nature, and gave it a name which it is still convenient to use in describing the inhabitants of Wales, although the majority of them to-day are Iberian in their slight physique and dark colouring. When the Romans came to Britain in the first century of the Christian era, they found the Celtic tribes supreme in Wales, and the priests of their religion—the Druids—as powerful as they were in Gaul. In spite of their military skill, the Romans failed to latinize Wales, and the later invaders, the Anglo-Saxons and Scandinavians, although they established themselves in England by driving the Celts westwards, stayed in England and did not penetrate into the inhospitable mountainous country of Wales.

For five centuries after the fall of Rome, and until the Norman Conquest of England in the eleventh century, Wales lived her own life, defending herself against Norse and other invaders. It was a troubled life of inter-tribal wars, of conflict between petty princes, pastoral in nature, but it developed an intricate and elaborate code of laws, itself an index of a characteristic nationality growing under the native princes. With the Norman Conquest, the large-scale invasion of Wales began, and it was followed by English invasions and sporadic attempts at conquest, culminating in 1536 in the Act of Union of England and Wales. In 1485, Wales gave England a Welshman, Henry Tudor, who became King Henry VII, the first of the Tudor sovereigns. From the sixteenth century to the present time, Wales has maintained her individuality as a country under the crown of the United Kingdom, without separate government, but with the distinctive marks of language and nationality.

So much for history. What kind of people are the Welsh to-day, and how do they differ from the English? What affinities have they with other peoples in other countries of Europe?

Wales is a mountainous country, scored with valleys opening into fertile plains, and there are certain points of similarity between mountain people all over the world. Dark haired, spare in frame, and active, with an underlying seriousness that grows naturally out of the struggle against nature for a livelihood based upon the soil : in all this, the Welsh resemble other mountain peoples. But they are lively in speech and gifted in singing, quick in temper, and proud ; clannish, even in exile. In all the countries in the world, the Welsh gather together at every opportunity, to sing, to talk of the home

country, to speak Welsh and to foster their love of literature and music. Their gift of expression in speech and their readiness in personal contacts, a lack of shyness and an intense curiosity about other people, help them to establish good relations with strangers everywhere. They have a passion for learning, and this also assists them in intercourse. They are more mercurial than the English, and less pertinacious ; more given to sudden enthusiasms, less patient in pursuing them ; impatient of criticism and sensitive to approval, more easily swayed, and lacking in that patient persistence so characteristic of their English neighbours.

In the north-western corner of France, in Brittany, the Bretons speak a Celtic language akin to Welsh : they migrated there from Britain somewhere about the fifth century A.D. They are cousins to the Welsh, whom they resemble physically, but the similarity between the two peoples cannot conceal one important difference : the Bretons are Catholic, and the Welsh are Protestant. The same difference exists between the Welsh and another Celtic people, the Irish.

The Welsh nation is a compact and lively body of people, living in amity with its neighbours, cultivating its own way of life, and giving expression to its character in two arts, literature and music. It has little to offer the world in the plastic arts. In the eighteenth century it produced a great landscape painter, Richard Wilson, and there are distinguished Welsh painters to-day, but there is no Welsh School in Painting, no native tradition. In architecture, the height of Welsh achievement is the small farmhouse, for the great castles are Welsh in location only, and there is nothing peculiarly Welsh about the old churches or the larger houses.

Wales is a poor country ; until coal and iron became the staple of industry in South Wales in the last century, it would not be an exaggeration to call it a poverty-stricken country, a land of small farms, hamlets, and villages, with a few small towns. Even now there are only two large cities in Wales, and a hundred years ago they were villages. There is no urban tradition in Wales, and that is probably why the plastic arts have not flourished in the country, and also why its architecture is small-scale and severely practical in purpose.

The lack of an urban tradition at once distinguishes Wales from England and most European countries, but the restless genius of the Welsh must always find a means of expression, and it has built for itself, down the ages, something which it may well claim to be unique : a rural tradition in which literature (poetry in particular) and singing are the chief constituents. If it be a mark of education to cherish an intricate and elaborate school of poetry—and who would deny it?—then the Welsh can claim to be a highly educated peasantry, and to have had that character for centuries. Let us examine more closely the ways in which Wales has given expression to her native powers, in music and in literature. Contrary to the common belief, Wales has achieved more in literature than in music.

Chapter II

THE MUSIC OF WALES

The Welsh are generally regarded as a musical nation, and it would be a bold man who would seek to deny this. If you find a score of Welsh people, in Wales or out of it, you will find a choir. They sing, for their own delight, and they always sing in harmony. They sing in parts as naturally and easily as they talk. They like music, they like talking about it. They sing in tune, and their voices have a pleasant quality, especially in combination. They are quite un-selfconscious about their singing : they do not need the stimulus of an audience. Whether they meet in tens or in thousands, in a small country chapel or in a vast assembly in the open air, at a football match or a political gathering, they sing freely and without any pre-arrangement. It is not necessary to *organize* singing in Wales : it happens of its own.

Clearly, a people of whom this is true must be allowed to be musical, to be gifted in that art, and to approach it with a pre-disposition. But it is legitimate to ask whether their contribution to the world's music corresponds to their native endowment, and the answer is somewhat puzzling and disappointing.

Wales has not produced a great composer, nor indeed has she come within measureable distance of doing so. No Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms ; not even a Weber or Rossini or Gounod, to descend in the scale. Her neighbour England, often quite wrongly traduced as being an unmusical nation, has produced an Elgar in our time, and a galaxy of composers in the

sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Even admitting that genius is not born according to plan, and that the great composer is a gift to a country as unexpected as uncontrivable, there is such a thing as a mass of talent and the confident expectation that the great man will surely come to stand upon the shoulders of faithful servants of the art. In many European countries, at various stages in their history, there have been periods of mere competence, of steady devotion, and of patient waiting for the miracle to happen and for the new voice to be heard. It has never been true of Wales, until very recent times, that the country was set and ready for the appearance of the great composer. The pre-requisites were lacking : there was no orchestra, no opera-house, no body of instrumentalists to set a standard of performance. Consequently, there was no opportunity of hearing the works of the great composers of the past. A musician cannot grow in silence, deprived of hearing, unacquainted with the classics of his art : he must reach the frontiers of music and be familiar with the work of his predecessors and his contemporaries before he begins to explore and conquer new territory.

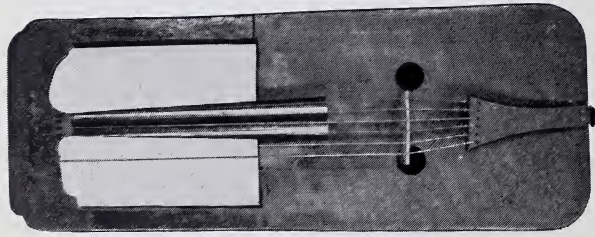
Reference has already been made to the fact that there is no urban tradition in Wales : the art of living in towns has not been cultivated, the intelligent patron of the arts—in the days when such existed—did not live in Wales. The great landowners drew their income from Wales and spent it in England or on the Continent, making no attempt to enrich life in their own country, or to provide in it the graces and adornments which they demanded elsewhere. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the years of orchestral growth and formation, passed by without creating the habit of orchestral

music in Wales. Orchestral music and opera, and even chamber music as we know it to-day, belong to towns : they are part of an urban civilization which Wales did not possess. That is why Wales has produced no composers of standing, to say nothing of genius. Time alone will show whether the comparatively recent provision of orchestral music, on an unextravagant scale, will bring about a change.

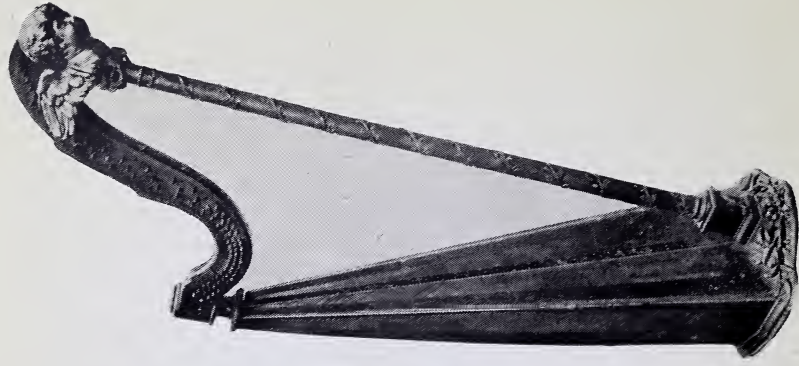
Like every other country, Wales has a large fund of folk music, of folk songs, and of instrumental tunes. No one has yet succeeded in securing general agreement upon the question : how old must a song be before it can be called a folksong ? There is, of course, a science of folksong, with its careful examination of variant forms, of imitations, of echo phrases and common turns of musical speech, of "period" modes and styles. The folksong of yesterday often turns out to be a slight variation upon an older melody whose composer we know. But when all has been done in the way of pruning and sorting and comparing, the fact remains that the corpus of the folksong in Wales is large and rich. Little of it is known outside Wales. The Welsh airs, so familiar to many in national collections, are mostly harp tunes and comparatively recent. Indeed, many of them have a diatonic "squareness" which labels them at once. The well-known tune, "The Men of Harlech," possibly the best known of Welsh airs, for it has been given wide currency as the regimental march of the Welsh Regiment, has all the appearance of having been composed as a march, and by a regimental bandmaster ! In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when there was a vogue for national music in the British Isles and elsewhere, and publication became the fashion, it happened that the

new ran trugaret. Rinte
 vii keinhaw amisser. Dyar
 adar glas callet. Ewidir
 in rich. ich iguet. Guirt
 mor birthottor turet. Ban
 ganhont cogev ar blaen
 gutt guir handid mui.
 vyllauuridet. Gost mui
 amluc anhunet. kan eth
 int us kereint in atwret.
 ym brin in tynno. in in y flet
 mor impop fort. itelhen. rac

A page from the Black Book of Carmarthen
 (By kind permission of the National Library of Wales)



(Left) Crwth



(By kind permission of the National Library of Wales)

(Right) Triple Harp (By kind permission of the National Library of Wales)

melodies chosen to represent Wales were nearly all of the diatonic type. The result was that the "Welsh air" as commonly known, however attractive it may be, is anything but representative of the true and indigenous song of the country, and is generally not very old. The older tunes are modal and free, sad and beautiful, with many cadences that sound familiar to all who have listened to peasant song in any country; they carry the aspiration and resignation, the desires and disappointments, that epigrammatic history of man's endeavour, and, indeed, the very soul of struggling humanity everywhere. When they become better known outside Wales—and there is a definite prospect that they will soon be made available—the voice of Wales will sound its true note.

Until the decline of the Welsh princes in the sixteenth century, every Welsh household of note had its harpist; the fashion continued into later times, but in the early days the harpist was an important official, with a well-defined status in the social hierarchy. There was also a hierarchy of the arts, with various grades of poets and musicians, organized and controlled. The laws of the country defined their rights, rewards, and responsibilities. The pattern of life in those days established the harp as the instrument of the country, and the tradition survives. There was also another instrument, not so highly regarded, and now totally out of use. This was the "crwth" a rectangular-shaped string instrument, played with a bow; little is known about it, and none of its music has survived.

The evolution of the harp in Wales, from its simple prototype through the intricate "triple harp" to the pedal harp of to-day does not concern us here, although its history is

interesting to musicians and scholars. For our purpose it is more profitable to dwell upon two matters affecting the harp and its use which are not widely known.

The first is the Welsh art of singing to the harp. This is not a matter of singing an air to harp accompaniment : that can be found in any country where the harp is played. It is something unique, and if it sounds complex in the description, it is because it is a highly developed and intricate art, with strict rules. The harpist begins to play an air, usually a simple diatonic tune in common time. Then, suddenly, the singer begins a descant to the air ; this must start on an off-beat. The singer must end with the air, or with a section of it, in a full close. Between beginning and ending, he sings a verse stanza. There are hundreds of traditional verses which can be sung, but the singer is not restricted to these—he can choose his own poems. The point at which the descant begins depends upon the number of syllables in the stanza, and upon the air. Thus described, it seems to call for both musical and mathematical ability of a high order. What is unexpected about it is that on this foundation a free and virile art has grown up over the centuries, and that it is an art of the people. In this form it is peculiar to the northern part of Wales, for some reason which is not obvious. The singer chooses his air and his verses, and makes his own descant ; some who are exceptionally gifted make their own verses, often topical and witty. It might well be imagined that this combination of restriction and liberty would tend to confine its practice to the few, to the intelligentsia, and to make it an art of the salon. But this is not so. It is a popular art, and that in itself is an eloquent testimony to the strength and quality of the mind of

the people of Wales. If, in origin, it sprang from the habit of declaiming verse to music, as seems probable, it has developed into a form of its own, without equivalent elsewhere.

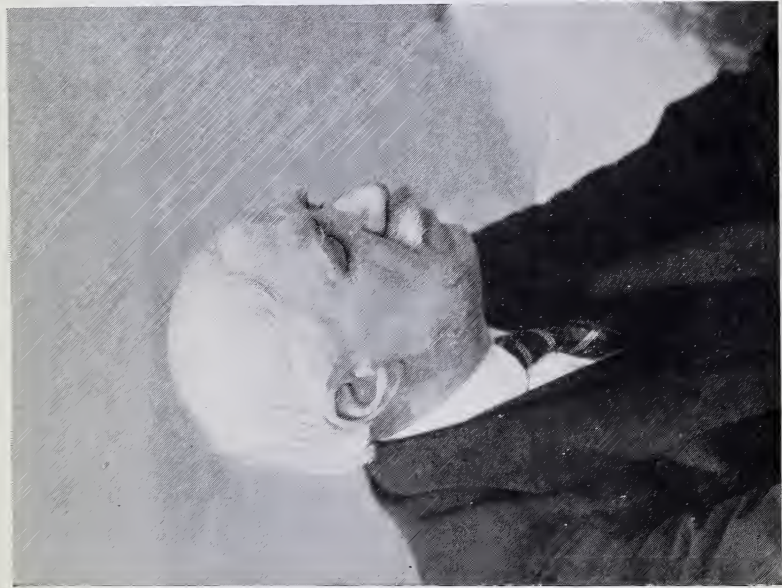
The other matter concerning the harp is possibly more important to the rest of the world, for it opens a new chapter in the history of music generally. There is a small folio Welsh manuscript in the British Museum, written in a seventeenth-century handwriting, containing some ninety pages of music in tablature notation. It has passed through many hands, and in the eighteenth century someone wrote on it the pious opinion that "The following manuscript is the music of the Britains, as settled by a Congress, or Meeting of the Masters of Music, by order of Gryffydd ap Cynan, Prince of Wales, about 1100 A.D., with some of the most ancient pieces of the Britains, supposed to have been handed down to us from the British Druids." However that may be, there is no question about the authenticity of the manuscript, nor that it was written in the early part of the seventeenth century. The tablature differs from the commonly known forms of musical notation, and the writer of the manuscript added to it a double key to the tablature, from which we can infer that it was not widely known even in his time. The Welsh tradition of instruction, in music and in poetry, was oral, handed down from master to pupil, under strict control. Many attempts were made at deciphering this tablature, with no convincing progress until that great scholar and musician, Arnold Dolmetsch, mastered it and made transcriptions of some of the contents of the manuscript into modern notation. These transcriptions, together with a facsimile of the manuscript, were published, and gramophone records of some of the pieces, played on a

small harp, were issued in 1937. This material now awaits the attention of musicians and scholars, but the war has interfered with the dissemination of the music.

It is difficult to describe music in words, but an attempt must be made to show why this early Welsh harp music is thought to be very old—much older than the manuscript—and also very important musically. If we take a quick glance at the history of music in Europe from the thirteenth century to the eighteenth century, we see it—admittedly foreshortened—as a period of devotion to counterpoint. We can follow the varying growth of contrapuntal skill, in the vocal part-writing of Palestrina and Vittoria; in the English Madrigal School, and in the triumph of the English Viol Fantasies in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. There we are sometimes led through bold harmonies, but they owe their boldness to the exigencies of the counterpoint. Then, later, we see the growth of the “vertical” use of chords, in conjunction with a rhapsodic manner of writing, leading us from, say, Bach’s recitatives to the music of the nineteenth century.

The outstanding characteristics of this early Welsh music are that its harmonic language is nearer that of our own day, and that a melodic line of rhapsody is woven into the harmony. The music critic of the *London Times* described one of the pieces in these terms :

“It starts on an unprepared discord of the *appoggiatura* type; it dwells on melodic motives which draw their character from the contrast of poignant discords seeking and ultimately finding resolution in consonance, and alternating with arabesques producing a curious hesitancy by the use of rapid repetitions of notes. . . . The fact is that the ancient harper uses what has



Two contemporary Welsh poets

(Left) Professor W. J. Gruffydd; (Right) T. Gwynn Jones

been the common speech of rhapsodic harmony at any time in the era which extends from Bach to Elgar, but it is a speech so dependent on the clear recognition of chords as parts of speech that little trace of it is to be found in what is generally thought of as the contrapuntal period which culminated in Palestrina, Lassus, and Byrd."

Here, then, is a unique and definitely Welsh contribution to music and its history, preserved, almost by a miracle, in the archives of the British Museum. If the seventeenth-century harpist had not put it on paper it would have vanished for ever, as there is no trace of it elsewhere, nor any surviving tradition of its use.

A few pages earlier, it was stated that the Welsh are given to singing in parts, and that almost any gathering of Welsh people, for whatever purpose assembled, immediately forms itself into a choir and begins to sing in harmony. It is natural to ask, what do they sing on these occasions, as distinguished from premeditated concert performances of choral works?

The answer is that they sing hymn tunes, the tunes they learnt in their childhood and sang in church and chapel. It may seem somewhat incongruous that a crowd at a football match should sing hymns. But it happens, and nothing can prevent it. People like to sing the tunes they know and love, and these are they. And they are good tunes, some of them with a long history, others more recently adopted into favour. They stand for something fundamentally Welsh, in use and in character. "These old Welsh tunes," says one Welsh writer, "have in them something of the universal, an adaptability of their own. They hold the mood of the moment without loss of dignity or grandeur; they are strong tunes, and they carry

the voice with them into a region of nobility and power even when they are mourning. They stand above their harmonies, for they were not born of a keyboard. The oldest among them have had a long life before the church and chapel took them into service, so that they have a peasant shape, an air of inevitability. They are not sung as they are written ; here and there a slur or an ornament still survives from the days when a measure of improvisation was not regarded as display, but as a personal comment upon the tune, so that a woman might sing it thus because her mother always sang it so. Until a more elaborate system of notation is used some of the intervals cannot be written, for they are not diatonic, and it is strange that the correct intervals still survive to shame the pipe organ. Several of the great tunes were written early in the last century by men—farmers, labourers—who had no other title to fame in music, and no schooling in it. But they succeeded in translating some great emotional experience into music—we know of one that a stormy night upon a lonely moorland, when darkness overtook man and horse, turned the words of a poem into a remarkable melody, a song of life above death. It is of these tunes a Welshman thinks when asked about the music of his country, and it is in singing them, in parts, that he is at his most personal and intimate in self-expression.”

A nation gives of its best, year in and year out, and from one generation to another, to what is nearest to its heart. In singing these tunes the Welsh can indulge in the delight of good poetry set to good music, for many of the hymns are written by their foremost lyric poets. It is no accident that these two pleasures should be associated, in memory, if not always in actual performance, with the intimacies of a non-

ritualistic form of worship, for the Welsh are Protestant in religion. Some accident of nature gave them good voices, but it is no accident that brought about their dedication to singing those fine hymn tunes. The emotional pressure which drove a poor peasantry to build, at its own cost, a chapel for its worship and to give its heart to maintaining this private civilization in a world of penury, must of necessity find an aesthetic to express what is fluctuating and permanent in its moods. It is fortunate for all who come in contact with them that the Welsh people express themselves in the universal language of music.

To conclude this survey of music in Wales without referring to recent developments would be to suggest that the country looks backwards only, and not forward. Improved means of communication, the spread of academic education, increased opportunities of hearing instrumental music, chamber and orchestral, and, of course, the gramophone and broadcasting, have combined in the present century to quicken the pace in music. The country now demands its National Symphony Orchestra, and will get it. The younger composers are abreast of their opportunity, and soon the world will hear them. In Wales, the audience is ready and waiting.

Chapter III

WELSH LITERATURE

Any account of Welsh literature must begin by making it perfectly clear what is meant by the term. Literature is, of course, the written word : it is not necessary to go beyond that bald statement for this purpose. But what is *Welsh* literature ?

There are two languages in current use in Wales to-day, Welsh and English. As we go back in time and uncover the centuries, we find that the use of English shrinks until we reach a period, some few hundreds of years ago, when English was unknown in Wales, or known only to a small handful of clerics or princes who had had contact with England. Even a hundred years ago, few Welshmen spoke English ; two hundred years ago the number was negligible. Nowadays, half the inhabitants of Wales speak Welsh and English, and half speak English only. Throughout this length of time—say, eight hundred years—the word has been written, first in Welsh only, and then in Welsh and English. There is literature in both languages written by Welshmen. Which, then, is to be called Welsh literature ?

Clearly, the answer must be : Literature in the Welsh language. That, and that alone, is Welsh literature. It is necessary to stress this point at the outset. It does not mean that no consideration will be given to literature in English, written by Welshmen, but it does mean that such activity will be correctly described as a contribution to the fund of English literature. Or possibly, to use a fashionable word which, as

applied to an individual, is a contradiction in terms, to "Anglo-Welsh" literature. But pride of place, and of emphasis, must naturally be given, by a Welshman, to his own language, Welsh. There is, too, another reason: what Welshmen have written in English, if it is at all worthy of consideration, starts its life with the prospect of the currency of the rest of English literature, and is not so much in need of description.

The history of Welsh literature, thus defined, is long and distinguished. The language was set and formed, for the purposes of a writer, some twelve centuries ago. But the vicissitudes of time, the long tale of destruction that accompanies tribal warfare, and the paucity of written records in an age of unsettled conditions, all combine to shorten the record. Nevertheless, the story begins in the thirteenth century, the age in which the first surviving manuscript was written, but it was an old story even then, a tale of happenings in the sixth century. Appropriately enough, the record begins with poetry, for the glory of Welsh literature, from its earliest days to the present time, is its poetry. Only rarely has its prose reached Olympian heights. And, as is not surprising in a nation that has known much of the sorrows of war, the earliest poems are a lament for youth slain in war in the sixth century.

Three hundred by command waging war,
And after the shout of joy there was silence ;
Though they go churchwards to shrive them—
True is the tale—death will have them.*

In the same poem we find a line, ageless in its truth and pity :
"His sword rang in the heads of mothers."

* The author wishes to acknowledge his indebtedness to Sir Idris Bell's scholarly work, *The Development of Welsh Poetry*, and in particular to his translations from the Welsh.

This was an age of much warfare, cruelty, and oppression, and although the hero is extolled for his valour, the price of war, in terms of human suffering, is never forgotten by the poet. And however primitive the conditions, the poetry is mature and strong : there is nothing tentative about metre or language. The art of poetry was already well established.

The next main period is that of the medieval poets, from the eleventh to fourteenth centuries. Their work is characterized by a greater formalism, and the creation of stringent rules of prosody, of which more will be said later. This change of style accompanied, or followed, greater stability in the social order. The poet became an important official in the hierarchy of the prince's court, and his precedence and privileges were carefully guarded by law. His duties were laid down : when the king required a song, he was to sing first a song of God, and then a song of kings. In matter and in manner, poetry reflected this social change : it became courtly and stylized, and typically medieval in its respect for order in literature as well as in life. Austere and somewhat remote from the concerns of ordinary men and women ; deliberate and " artificial," in the sense of a conscious striving to keep within an established pattern ; in the true use of the word, classical.

But emotion cannot always be confined within the bounds of poetic convention. When the death of one of the princes brought an end to the political hopes of the country, the poet's elegy transcends all discipline and rises in a magnificent storm of words, ending on the note of doom.

Do ye not see the rush of the wind and the rain ?

Do ye not see the oaks beating together ?

THE VOICE OF WALES

Do ye not see the sea scourging the land ?

Do ye not see the truth gathering itself together ?

Do ye not see the sun rushing through the heaven ?

Do ye not see that the stars are fallen ?

Do ye not believe in God, fond mortal men ?

Do ye not see that the world is done ?

A sigh to thee, O God, that the sea might come, overwhelming the land !

Why are we left to wait ?

Throughout the long and troubled centuries, from the ninth to the fifteenth, when Wales lived in a state of intermittent warfare, a strand of poetry of another type runs through the tapestry. It may be described briefly as patriotic. Beginning with the poet's concern with the fate of his country, or his particular principality in the age of the native princes, it takes on a prophetic tinge, promising ultimate triumph in spite of the fluctuations of fortune. The poets appealed to the supernatural, and made of the great figures of the past a mythology for the comfort of their contemporaries. Arthur, Merlin, Taliesin—names familiar to all readers of romance—took on the shape of deliverers and assumed immortality. They were not dead, but sleeping. Reincarnation, disguise, magic powers—all these were attributed to them by the poets, poems were written in their name. In this, of course, Welsh poetry follows a familiar European tradition ; to quote only one instance, in the Middle Ages, Virgil underwent a transformation into a magician. In later times, when the Normans were struggling for supremacy in Wales, it was safer for the poet to father his prophecies upon some hero of the past, leaving the interpretation to his audience. Relics of paganism appear in many of these poems, in the form of invocations to the apple tree and the wild pigs in the forest, together with

the commonplaces of theology and what passed for scientific knowledge. The riddle, the proverb, and the gnomic stanza all find their place, and in much that is arid there gleams the light of nature poetry.

Amid so much that is common to European poetry in the Middle Ages, there is one feature which is unique, and that is Welsh prosody. By the fourteenth century this was established in a form which is still practised to-day. In the true use of the term, it is something native to the Welsh language, otherwise it would not have survived into the present age of freedom in verse.

It is not possible here to give more than an outline of this prosody, for it is a complicated system. Welsh verse can be divided into two categories: "strict" and "free." In Welsh, "free" verse is what would be called "strict" verse in most European languages, *i.e.* it is rhymed and regular in metre. To a Welshman, an English or Italian sonnet is in "free" verse: nothing is required but metre and rhyme. But a Welsh poet writing "strict" verse—and all the great poets have done so from the fourteenth century to the present day—writes in what is called "cynghanedd." This is a combination of internal rhyme and alliteration; alliteration, not in the sense of the repetition of initial consonants in the words, but taking the form of an exact consonantal equivalence. Within a rigid syllabic framework, we find a sequence of consonants in the first part of a line echoed by the same sequence in the second part. Or a syllable in the first part is rhymed by a syllable in the second part. The system is elaborate, and the brief description given above cannot do more than suggest some of its possibilities. The play of



*Two young Welsh poets writing in English
(Left) Vernon Watkins; (Right) Dylan Thomas*



(Above) Singing in Chapel at a Harvest Festival service

(Below) An Eisteddfod in Northern Wales, with performers in traditional Druid dress

consonants is shown in the following line, with the caesura marked :

Bras gamu | brysio g ymaith
br sg m br s g m

It is impossible to give an English metrical equivalent without doing violence to the English language, but the prose meaning of the line is "striding hurriedly away."

The reader might well expect that so rigid a system of prosody, so intricate a corpus of poetic law, could produce nothing but correct and ingenious verse, consonantly accurate, but empty and uninspired. But strictness of form has always been an incentive rather than a hindrance to poetry in all countries. And it must be remembered that if the Welsh language did not lend itself to this use, the poet would have been the first to introduce novelty, for such is always his nature. Welsh is singularly rich in synonyms, and freely creates compound words at need, without clumsiness or violence. Welsh poetry, in the "strict" forms and classical metres, is free and soaring, and, unexpectedly, lyrical in character throughout the ages. Epic poetry is lacking, and the narrative is of recent growth. There is none of the vague mysticism commonly associated with the Celtic nature, no "twilight." Instead, we find verbal felicity at its highest, and at a time when such a phenomenon was rare in European poetry, vivid observation of natural objects, succinctly and memorably phrased.

With the fourteenth century came the prince of Welsh poets, Dafydd ap Gwilym, and he brought a new note into Welsh poetry. He established firmly a new metre called the "cywydd" : it consists of rhymed couplets, seven syllables

to a line, and the rhyme is always of a stressed with an unstressed syllable. Each line is in "cynghanedd," so that there may be internal rhyming in addition to consonantal equivalence. The average length of the poem is fifty lines. Much of it is love poetry, and it takes its origin in Provençal literature. The influence of the troubadours is obvious, and so is that of the *clerici vagantes*, but we know that it was not direct. A parallel movement in northern France, in Spain, in Germany and the Low Countries shows that Europe was waiting for such a development. In his love poetry, Dafydd ap Gwilym plays variations upon the theme of *amour courtois*, but in his nature poetry convention gives place to passion, to the direct and personal observation that characterizes the great poet, a quality rare in medieval poetry.

The following short poem, brilliantly translated by Sir Idris Bell, shows Dafydd ap Gwilym's virtuosity in handling a traditional theme :

Go greet—nay, greet not—messenger—
 I know not whom—my fairest fair ;
 Ask her I greeted t'other day—
 But ask her what ?—how can I say ?—
 That she tomorrow morn will go—
 Whither ?—O fool ! I do not know.
 And add besides that I'll be there—
 But I've no inkling when or where !
 And if she ask, that dainty dame,
 Who sent you forth, and what his name,
 Say you—but with sealed lips reply—
 How oft I change !—" I know not, I !"
 And should you see her beauty bright—
 Though 'twere unseen, a heavenly sight,
 Fair as the opening eyes of day !—
 Pray you, o' God's name, nothing say !

In another poem to the ladies of Llanbadarn he confesses that :

Never was Sunday that passed by
But in Llanbadarn church was I,
My looks for the ladies, signalling love,
And the nape of my neck for God above.

His vivid descriptions of nature are woven into his love poems, particularly where he is addressing a love-messenger, a theme often found in Provençal poetry. He despatches a tit with a message to his mistress :

Up, little tit, demure and shy,
With your coal-black head and weak cry,
Up, and northward get you gone
To my sweet lady, my lovely one.
To Meirion haste and there rehearse
On May's bright boughs your dainty verse.
You bridge the hedges in quick flight,
You ride the close-branched birch's height ;
A gray-billed bird, with plaintive cry,
Your four-hued shape goes darting by :
Green and blue, white and black,
A lovely sempstress, the leaves you peck,
Trusty friend of lovers young,
Tiny singer of sweet song,
Stout in fight, unafraid,
Little nimble gray-cheeked bird.
Off like the wind, with rush and whirl,
To Meirion, to my golden girl ;
Give tongue before her beauty's pride
And bid good-day to Dafydd's bride.

In sterner mood, he describes a snowy day :

I cannot sleep or take the air—
 Of a truth this load is hard to bear !
 Ford or slope is none to be found,
 Nor open space, nor bare ground.
 No girl's word shall tempt me now
 Out of my house into the snow.
 The plaguey feathers drifting down
 Like dragon's scales cling to the gown,
 And all I wear would soon be
 White as a miller's coat to see.
 True 'tis, the Winter Calends gone,
 Ermine's the wear for everyone ;
 In January's month, first of the year,
 God makes hermits everywhere.
 Everywhere, the country round,
 He has whitewashed the black ground,
 Clothed in white each woodland glade,
 On every copse a white sheet spread.
 To every stump clings heavenly meal,
 Like the white blossoms of April.
 A cold veil on the forest lies,
 A load of chalk crushes the trees.
 Like wheaten flour the drifts appear,
 A coat of mail that the plains wear,
 A cold grit on field and fallow,
 On earth's whole skin a thick tallow,
 Foam-flakes flying thick and fast,
 Fleeces big as a man's fist,
 White bees of heaven on the wing,
 Through all Gwynedd wandering.
 Will God's plenty never cease—
 So many feathers of holy geese,
 Like winnowed chaff, heaped together,
 A robe of ermine above the heather ?



Men of Wales

(Above) The First Earl Lloyd George, speaking at a National Eisteddfod (Below) Quarrymen at work in a slate quarry



*(Above) Welsh miners after the day's work drinking beer in the pub
(Below) Welsh miners in the pit, listening to a song by Howard Jones,
who is training to become a professional singer*

The poets did not confine themselves to the ornaments of life and its pleasant places, to the delights of nature and of love. The voice of Sion Cent, in the early part of the fifteenth century, cuts through the elegancies and arabesques of literature with the grim insistence of a prophet. God in His greatness, man in his weakness and sin, the hazards of the pursuit of the good life here below : these are his preoccupation, and his poems, in their strong sincerity and their concern with the life of the common man, are timeless in their truth. (The first two stanzas of Sir Idris Bell's masterly translation of "Nid oes iawn gyfaill ond Un," wisely abandoning any attempt to reproduce in English the "cynghanedd" in the original, reveal the passion and faith of this great poet :

Of Christian faith the world is bare,
 Of falsehood full this many a day ;
 On life's extremest verge we fare,
 Man's frowardness increaseth aye.
 This is it that in vision came
 To Daniel, as his book doth show :
 Till Doomsday, saith the tongue of flame,
 Still worse and worse the world must grow.
 No man is heedful, steadfast none ;
 There is no faithful friend but One.

Man's nature, dark it is with sin,
 In endless coil of evil lost.
 His substance is corrupt within,
 His friendship frailer than the frost.
 The hoar-frost on the country lies
 Three days at most ere falls the rain ;
 Man's plighted faith, that swiftlier flies,
 Will scarcely two its trust maintain.
 If the world's ways be throughly known,
 There is no faithful friend but One.

From the same century comes the lament of Lewis Glyn Cothi for his dead child, with its moving simplicity and intimacy :

A rosy apple, pebbles white,
A little bird were his delight ;
A thorn-twigg bended for a bow
And swords of wood he treasured too ;
The pipe, the bogey-man he'd fear,
Plague for a ball his mother's ear,
Cheer us with careless carolling,
And for a nut would *yo-ho !* sing,
Would coax in pretty, wheedling way,
And sulk if I had said him nay,
Then for a chip be friends again,
Or dice, of which his heart was fain.

From the fourteenth century onwards to our day, Welsh poets have used the classical metres, the "strict" forms, freely and abundantly. There is nothing "antique" about them, and the twentieth-century poet, rebel though he may be in all else, uses them as naturally as any of his predecessors. One form in particular has become exceedingly popular : an epigrammatic four-line stanza of thirty syllables called the "englyn." Hundreds of these stanzas are written every year, with varying skill and poetic worth, so popular is the form, in spite of the difficulties of "cynghanedd." Here is a modern example :

I'r addfwyn rhowch orweddfa—mewn oer Fawrth,
Mewn rhyferthwy gaea' ;
Rhowch wedd wen dan orchudd ia,
Rhowch dynerwch dan eira.

(Her peace the grave shall give her—with cold March
And winter's storm above her.
Lay beauty low ; frost shall clothe her ;
Lay kindness low with snow for cover.)

So much for the long and living tradition embodied in the classical metres and in "strict" verse, but before leaving it it should be said that mastery of the form is not, and has not been, confined to those whose station in life carries with it the privilege of academic education. The knowledge of "cynghanedd" is shared by farm labourer and village craftsman, as well as the schoolmaster and parson. It is a popular art, for all its intricacy and discipline, and in this lies something unique in the Welsh character.

"Free" verse, rhymed and accentual like English verse, has also flourished, and there is a vast body of it dating from the sixteenth century onwards. It is almost entirely lyrical or ballad in form; the long poem is rare, and the epic non-existent. Drama in verse has never been popular in Wales, for the Puritan movement which eventually turned Wales into a Protestant country frowned upon such worldliness.

The two chief glories of Welsh prose are the Early Romances and the Welsh translation of the Bible. It is not necessary to say anything about the latter, save that it was done in the sixteenth century, in prose as magnificent and noble as the English translation. Its influence, as prose, was as pervading and permanent as its English counterpart; possibly more so, because fewer books were available in Welsh than in English. In the long years before Wales had its university, when schools were few and widely scattered, the prose of the Bible moulded the style as well as the thought of the people, and it preserved a uniform standard which stood above all local variations in dialect. It is impossible to exaggerate its value to the country, as prose.

Until about a hundred years ago, the knowledge of the

existence of a substantial body of early prose in Welsh was confined, outside Wales, to a few scholars. When Lady Charlotte Guest published her English translation of the "Mabinogion" in 1838, it created a sensation, and immediately became a classic. The stories appeared in French and in German, and their fame has grown ever since. They are a storehouse of legend, myth, and adventure, with all the richness and strength of medieval prose.

The "Mabinogion," and the other tales, are found in manuscripts of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, but the evidence goes to show that the four tales of the "Mabinogion" were assembled about two hundred years earlier. They are clearly the work of one man, whose name is unknown. He was a master of prose, for there is nothing tentative or primitive about his style. The matter of the stories is much older, and they contain several "layers" of happenings, including the intrusion of Christianity into pre-Christian events and settings. The four tales of the "Mabinogion" are a saga of Pryderi: his birth, how he was lost as a child and then restored to his parents, his adventures in Ireland, how he broke a magic spell put upon his country, and finally how he was killed in battle. That the author was a master of dialogue the following extract will show. The scene is a banquet, and the characters are Pwyll and Rhiannon, later to be Pryderi's father and mother. A youth enters, fair and handsome, of kingly bearing, and dressed in silk; Pwyll does not know him:

"God's welcome to you, friend; be seated," said Pwyll.

"Lord," the youth replied, "I have come to ask a boon of you."

"Whatever you ask, that you shall have, if it lie in my power," said Pwyll.



(Above) Harlech Castle overlooking marshes and Tremadoch Bay
(Below) Rhuddlan Castle



The Avon Pit—a typical Welsh industrial valley with village and colliery

THE VOICE OF WALES

"Oh!" cried Rhiannon, "why did you answer him thus?"

"He has given his answer, and before witnesses," said the youth.

"What do you seek?" asked Pwyll.

"To-night you are to marry the woman I love best, Rhiannon. And I am come for her and for this feast," the youth replied.

Pwyll was silent, for he had no answer to give.

"Keep silent as long as you can," said Rhiannon to Pwyll. "No man ever born was so foolish as you."

"But, Lady," Pwyll answered, "I did not know him."

"This is the man they would force me to marry, against my will," said Rhiannon to him. "As you have promised, give me to him, so that you be not shamed."

"Lady," cried Pwyll, "what kind of answer is that? I cannot give it."

"Promise me to him," she replied. "I will so contrive it that he shall never have me."

The other tales of the same period range over the whole field of mixed history and mythology. They vary in literary merit, but they are all interesting, and they reach out to much that is common in Celtic legend in Ireland and elsewhere. Two of them relate to King Arthur, but it is a mythical Arthur, not the Arthur of history. The relationship between the Welsh legendary tales and the Arthurian romances in French and German, and the extent of borrowing and the direction of influence, are matters for scholars, but at least one critic, neutral in nationality, asserts confidently that, as pure story-telling, the Welsh tales are vastly superior.

There is little of interest, except to Welshmen, in Welsh prose during the later centuries, until we come to modern times. The Welsh novel is of very recent growth, and the nineteenth century, which saw such a flowering in English and in Continental fiction, found Wales unready to follow the

example of other nations. In Wales, it was a century of earnest application to puritanism, a climate in which the novel does not flourish. But a beginning was made, and one Welsh novelist, Daniel Owen, achieved great popularity. It would be fair to describe him as a novelist born, but undisciplined, combining a vivid power of characterization, and a keen sense of humour, with a deplorable tendency to prosaic moralizing. At his best he is superb. He was a tailor by trade, and in any judgment of the achievement of Welsh writers it must be remembered that at no time in the history of the country has a creative writer been able to live by his pen. Some other trade he must have, if he is to live. This, of course, has not been without its effect upon the standards achieved.

The most notable feature of modern Welsh writing is the growth of the short story. In this craft there are many masters, and now that their work is being translated into English, their names and their work will soon be much more widely known. The outlook is bright, and at last it can be said that the Welsh novel is in the making.

No account of Welsh literature and music would be complete without reference to an occasion on which the two arts meet, and their practitioners and patrons join in festival. It is characteristic of the country that its National Festival, which is held in Welsh only, should be devoted to the arts. This festival, called an "Eisteddfod," is something uniquely Welsh, without counterpart elsewhere. Originally a meeting of professional bards and musicians to discuss their crafts, it grew into a popular meeting. It may be a local affair or a national gathering. It is seen at its best and most glorious in the National Eisteddfod, which is held once a year, alternately

in north and south Wales. It lasts a week, and scores of thousands of Welsh people will attend it, to listen to the competitions; choirs, soloists, instrumental players, and composers compete for prizes. The climax of the week is the elaborate ceremony called the Chairing of the Bard. The poet who submits the best poem in the "strict" classical metres is solemnly chaired before the audience with picturesque ritual. Prizes are awarded for literary work of all types, including historical research, and also for the plastic arts.

What is unique about the National Eisteddfod is not so much that it is dedicated to the arts, and in particular to Welsh literature and music, as that it is, in the true sense, a popular festival. It is a festival of the people, of the ordinary man and woman. Working people save money so as to be able to travel to it and attend the meetings; it is their holiday. The standards are high, and prizes are often withheld if the work is not of sufficient merit: there is no pandering to low taste. If a nation can be judged by its relaxations, by interests outside the means of livelihood of its people, the popularity of a festival devoted entirely to the arts is ample evidence that the indigenous Welsh culture is something spread throughout the country, something of which a small and poor nation may well be proud.

Chapter IV

MODERN WELSH WRITERS IN ENGLISH AND WELSH

So far we have dwelt on the achievements of the Welsh people in their own language, Welsh. But one half of the population speaks English only, and they also have made a contribution to literature in English. This is no recent development. The main body of English literature has, at various times and in various degrees, been enriched by the work of Welshmen. When they have reached eminence, their names are entered on the roll of England's poets and prose-writers, and it is not now necessary to record their achievements, for they are common knowledge wherever English is spoken or read. From George Herbert, Henry Vaughan, George Meredith to W. H. Davies the lyric poet, and Arthur Machen, the list is long and interesting. But it is more profitable for our purpose to pay some attention to the remarkable and recent efflorescence of writers from the Principality of Wales. So numerous are they that a detailed list of them would be tedious : a selection must be made.

In spite of the efforts of pioneers like the veteran Ernest Rhys, a poet who was among the early translators of Welsh poetry, it was not until after the war of 1914-18 that there appeared in any strength a body of Welsh writers who wrote in English about their country. The vogue of the short story in those years gave them their opportunity, and they took full advantage of it to publish their work in English periodicals and anthologies of stories. Geraint Goodwin, a gifted writer

who died young, set a high standard ; his acute vision, feverish almost in its intensity, and his passionate interest in the odd and unusual in humanity, were devoted to analysis of the people he knew best, the dwellers in the border country between England and Wales. However mundane his subject, his writing has a strange and unearthly beauty in his novels. An older writer, recently dead, Caradoc Evans, created a strange world and a stranger diction ; his bitter and powerful satires aroused the wrath of his countrymen. If they had not been so impatient, so resentful of anything but praise, they would have seen that his satire had overrun its truth in its eagerness. Its power as prose was obvious, but it is doubtful whether even the wholehearted approval of his work would have mellowed him to the point of control. He had no predecessors, and he had no imitators ; he remains a phenomenon, one of the " queer ones " of this world.

The rich and varied industrial life of South Wales offered a tempting subject to authors, and it still does. Rhys Davies has written some exquisite short stories, full of imagination and yet firmly based on reality, about his own people. And his novels have grown in stature with the years ; his output is considerable, although it is unhurried, and he has at last obtained the wide recognition he deserves. But the novelist of the coalfield, *par excellence*, is Jack Jones. He began life as a coalminer, and educated himself, and struggled to learn to write. The wild humour and sudden tenderness, the highly coloured life of the colliery villages and towns of the dark mining valleys of the south, the rich ebullience of eccentricity and impulsiveness, the vivid speech of the people—of all this he is master, both in novel and in drama. No one else is so

truly representative of his people, nor so able to present them to us.

The appearance of Richard Llewelyn's novel, *How Green was my Valley*, a few years before the outbreak of the recent war, had all the effect of an atomic bomb in the literary world. The overwhelming success of this novel, in Europe and in America, opened the eyes of the world to the existence of Wales. The success was all the greater for being unexpected; no one had connected this writer of stage plays with Wales. If the novel had done nothing else but prove that it is possible to make the world read about Wales, it would have rendered the country a service. But Richard Llewelyn is a good writer, and a storyteller born, and he has had the literary courage not to attempt to repeat himself. Another Welshman who has done his country good service is the dramatist and actor, Emlyn Williams. His notable skill and his mastery of stagecraft have killed one old theatrical tradition—that a play about Wales cannot be successful. His plays are popular everywhere, and they have done much to rouse sympathetic interest in Wales and its people in England and abroad, and to create a demand for closer knowledge of Welsh life.

In the last decade the pace has quickened. The contribution of Welsh authors to English literature has grown so rapidly that there is some justification for calling it a movement on its own, comparable with the earlier "Invasion" of England by Irish writers who were grouped together for convenience under the name of the Anglo-Irish School. It is convenient also to refer to this new development as "Anglo-Welsh," but the use of this term may lead to obscurity unless it is defined. A "French author" is obviously one who

writes in French as his native language ; what is a “ Welsh author ” ? To a Welsh-speaking Welshman, he is an author who writes in Welsh, who contributes to the fund of Welsh literature. But Wales is a bilingual country, and there are Welshmen who write in English ; some from choice, because they speak both languages ; others from necessity, because they do not know Welsh. The latter and the former make their contribution directly to the fund of English literature and may be called “ Anglo-Welsh ” for convenience. Authors who write in Welsh can only contribute to English literature indirectly, to the extent that they are translated into English ; they are Welsh authors.

So far comparatively little of recent writing in Welsh has been translated into English. Two volumes of short stories, both anthologies, have been published, but the greater part of their contents was written in English. The inclusion of some translations from the Welsh, however, revealed the need for more, and it is encouraging to note that a selection of short stories by Kate Roberts, the *doyenne* of Welsh story writers, is about to be published in translation. Her work is outstanding in quality, delicate and penetrating, revealing not only the intricacies of Welsh character, but also—almost by implication, so great is her restraint and control—the background of the life of the nation and its spiritual values. It is much to be hoped that this venture will prove to be merely the prelude to more activity in translation, so that writers in Welsh may receive recognition outside their own small country ; they need not fear comparison with other nations, for they have a distinctive contribution to make to literature in general.

Two lively and progressive literary journals, *Wales* and *The Welsh Review*, both written in English, have fostered and stimulated young writers, and the appearance of anthologies of short stories has introduced many new names to the wider public. In spite of the difficulties of war-time, new books of short stories have appeared, as well as novels. More important still is the steady flow of new poetry, by poets already established, such as Dylan Thomas, and by such newer poets as Vernon Watkins and Glyn Jones. In Alun Lewis, who was killed in the war, Wales lost a poet of stature. When Keidrych Rhys (the Editor of *Wales*) published in 1944 his anthology of modern Welsh poetry—and here again it is necessary to say that it is *not* Welsh poetry, but English poetry written by Welshmen—it was at once obvious that in numbers as well as in quality, the poets of the country commanded attention, and deserved it.

Dylan Thomas is the best known, and in some ways the best of these poets. He has carried his verbal sensitivity almost to the point at which he might be said to have created his own language :

And this weak house to marrow-columned heaven,
Is corner-cast, breath's rag, scrawled weed, a vain
And opium head, crow stalk, puffed, cut, and blown,
Or like the tide-looped breastknot reefed again
Or rent ancestrally the roped sea-hymen
And, pride is last, is like a child alone
By magnet winds to her blind mother drawn,
Bread and milk mansion in a toothless town.

It has been suggested that Dylan Thomas owes something of his virtuosity to the influence of the classical Welsh poets and their prosody, but if this is so, it must be at one remove



Hafod Lwyfog, Snowdonia—a gift to the Nation



(Above) Dipping sheep
(Below) Llyn Gwynant, Snowdonia

and not directly. The English poet Gerard Manley Hopkins studied Welsh prosody and "cynghanedd," and even tried to write some Welsh verse in the classical forms, with marked effect upon his use of words in English. His poems abound in instances of alliteration—or "consonantal chime" as he calls it—and in echoes of its strict use in Welsh verse, together with examples of compound words ("thick-dark," "bald-bright"). Such lines as "The down-dugged ground-hugged grey" and "Warm-laid grave of a womb-life grey,"
or

"Trench-right, the tide that ramps against the shore
With a flood or a fall, low lull-off or all roar"

or

"Down in deep woods the diamond delves! the elves-eyes," reveal Hopkins's debt to Welsh verse, and Hopkins himself has been a potent influence upon all our younger English poets, not always to their good.

It is natural to ask whether these poets and prose writers have succeeded in creating, in English, something peculiarly Welsh in character. So far as they depict the life of the country, the traditions and aspirations of its people, their shortcomings and their virtues, their ways of speech and turns of thought, they are doing something more than giving expression to their own impulses. They are taking advantage of the wide currency of English to add to the world's store of knowledge of humanity, of understanding, and of the sympathy that cannot thrive on ignorance. They are interpreters of a people. They can, with justice, claim that they are rendering this service to the cause of literature generally, and thus to understanding. Great art comes at no one's bidding, but it

comes not without preparation. These are the days of preparation, of venture and experiment in literature, of tentative efforts to bring about something the world will recognize as Welsh, even though it be written in English. The days of achievement will not be long delayed.

Important though it may be that writers of Welsh nationality should succeed in English, it is a thousand times more important that they should succeed in Welsh. This statement may seem paradoxical, but it is true. If the Welsh language were to die, Wales would become a geographical group of a few counties in western England, a mere region, and the Welsh would cease to be a nation. What is particular to a people would be lost, and it would have little or nothing of its own to offer to the world. A country and its language share a common fate, and a people creates its own language because it must, if it is to express its own genius. To lose a language is to lose something more than a literature; it is to abandon a way of life, to throw away a heritage, to betray the past and to impoverish the future. Fortunately for Wales, Welsh literature—literature in Welsh—has burst into flower in recent years, and in spite of the war and the shortage of paper, the number of new books published has increased rapidly and is still increasing. The standard of quality is rising, in novels, short stories, essays, and in poetry. It is when a country's writers produce literature which the world will read, even in translation, that they render the greatest service to their own and to other countries, and to their art. It is satisfactory to be able to say that much has been published recently in Welsh which demands to be translated, so that the world may share in it; more will come.

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